NEW NICK CARTER WEEKLY

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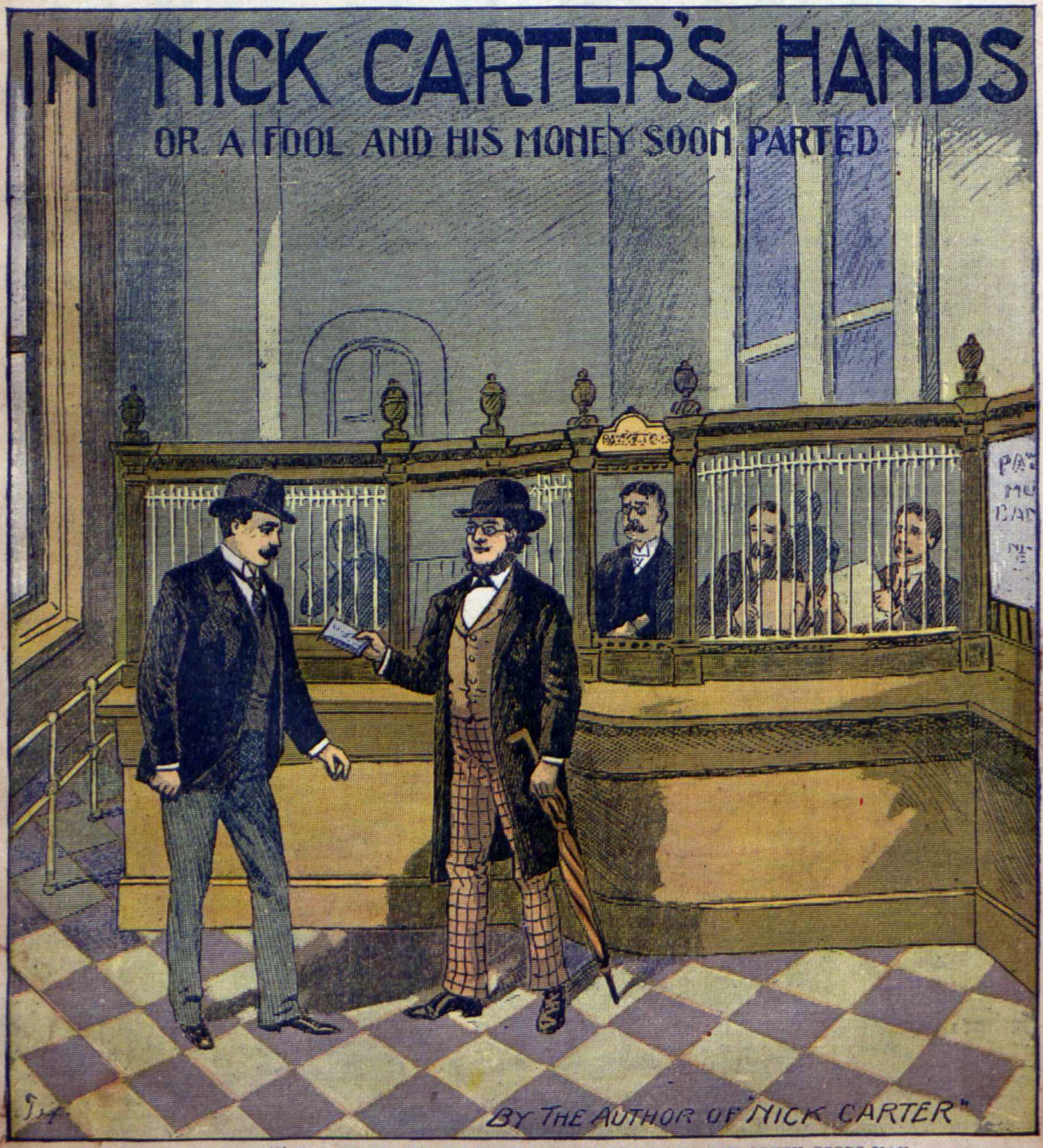
IN NICK CARTER'S HANDS

OR A FOOL AND HIS MONEY SOON PARTED



"HERE YOU ARE!" SAID NICK, AND HE HELD OUT THE MONEY TO THE GREEN GOODS MAN.

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IN NICK CARTER'S HANDS;

OR,

A Fool and His Money Soon Parted.

By the Author of "NICK CARTER."

CHAPTER I.

"A FOOL AND HIS MONEY."

It was early morning, and the clerk of one of the prominent hotels of Elizabeth, N. J., was gazing at his reflection in the office mirror and wondering why one end of his mustache would persist in sticking straight out, while the other curled in the most delightful manner, when a young man of intelligent and handsome features entered the office and hurriedly accosted him.

"Is J. G. Laroche staying here?"

"Look on the register and see for yourself."

The stranger examined the register with trembling hands.

"Yes, he's here, Room 148. Will you call him for me?"

"Why, of course."

The clerk touched an electric button, and a boy appeared instantly.

The stranger penciled a few lines on a card, and handed it to the boy, who took it and was off like a flash.

Five minutes elapsed and he returned with a pale face.

"Well, what is it?" gasped the stranger, his face turning suddenly as pale as death.

"Something's the matter up in 148."

"Couldn't you awaken him?" asked the clerk.

"No, and I smelled——"

"Gas?"

"Yes."

The clerk made a rush for the elevator, the stranger at his heels.

Up they went to the third floor.

When No. 148 was reached the strong odor of gas caused the same thought to enter each of their minds.

The clerk tried the door.

Locked.

He looked up at the transom.

Closed.

The stranger was about to break the door in, when the clerk produced a bunch of keys.

Selecting the right one, he pushed it in the lock, and turned it.

The stranger was the first to enter the room.

The smell of gas was almost overpowering.

But he was a young man of resource as well as presence of mind.

Without looking to right or left, he closed his lips, held his breath, and made for the chandelier, and turned off the gas.

The clerk in the meantime had rushed to one of the windows which overlooked the street, thrown open the inner blinds, and raised the window.

With both the door and window open, a good draught was produced and the foul and dangerous odor was soon carried away.

The blinds had been closed prior to the entrance of the two men, and their opening sent the full light of day into the room.

The young stranger, with an emotion of fear, turned his eyes toward the bed.

It was empty.

But the disarrangement of the clothes showed that it had been occupied during the night.

"Look under the bed!" said the clerk, in an awe-stricken tone.

He had seen what he took to be a man's foot from where he stood by the window.

The young man dropped on his knees, and looked as suggested.

What he saw confirmed his worst fears.

Under the bed, with his head toward the wall, was the body of a tall, thin man.

"Dead!" was the discoverer's agitated exclamation.

"Perhaps not. Drag him out, and let's take a look at him."

The body was dragged forth.

The face was livid and the eyes were closed.

The clerk tore open the man's shirt, and placed his ear over his heart.

"He's not dead," he cried out, cheerily. "Get some whisky down his throat, if you can, while I telephone for a doctor."

An hour later the victim of asphyxiation was lying on the lounge in his room and conversing in tremulous tones with the young man who had been the means of his rescue from the jaws of death.

"I am sorry, Jasper, drefful sorry," the man was saying, "but war plumb crazy when I foun' out thet I'd been swindled.

"I jes' turned on ther gas as a sort a' 'speriment, en ef it hadn't er worked all right, I'd er blown out my brains with thet ther pistol o' mine."

Jasper Orrant sighed.

He was not related to the raw-boned, lanky, hatchet-faced, middle-aged man who had made a fool of himself, but there had been a prospect at one time that he might form a legal tie by becoming his son-in-law.

"Tell me all about your experiences, Mr. Laroche," he said, quietly.

"Well, Jasper, it's er story as sorter reflects on the morils of the old man, but I can't help it. I'm as honest as the majority o' folks about, though I be a bigger fule than Bascom's donkey.

"Ez you knowed when you kem sparkin' 'roun' the place, Jasper, I had ez fine a farm ez you kin dig up ennywhars in Putnam County, Georgy.

"Fo' nigh onto a yere I ben er getten printed truck from some fellah in New York what wanted ter sell me money.

"Greenbacks is sca'ce down in Georgy, Jasper, ez you knows right well yo'self, so I 'lowed I'd come up yer an' git some cheap.

"The fellah's name what wrote the letters is Lafarge, en he worked ther snap in the fines' kind o' style.

"Most of the circulars I got war 'bout tariff reform, an' I'd read away ter ther last few lines afore I'd strike the milk in ther cocoanut, so ter speak.

"We're dead gone on ther tariff, down our way Jasper, an' all my neighbors got these same circulars, an' some of 'em thot that they spied er chance uv payin' their tariff on whisky by cheap greenbacks.

"This yer Lafarge he writ at last fer me to come ter Elizabeth, N. J., an' put up at this yer hotel.

"Thet's what I did, an' purty soon a fellah with black hair, mustache, side-

whiskers, an' a slick pusson met me, whispered '128' inter my yer—that was ther pass-word—an' then we got down ter business.

"He had three thousand dollars in greenbacks, which he said he'd sell ter me fer three hundred dollars.

"Thet was jus' ther size o' my wallet, an' I tole him so.

"Would I take a walk down ther street with him? Well, I reckoned I would, an' purty soon we met another man in front of a dark house on some street, whose name I disremember.

"I wuz ter walk inside ther house an' git my money.

"The second fellah, which had short hair and a red mustache, said I was lucky ter have kep' out er New York. 'You jes walk erlong ther street,' sez he, 'an' some one pulls er string, a hole opens under your feet, an' you disappear inter ther river.'

"That thar was a purty tough yarn, Jasper, but I swallyed it, an' waited fer my turn. Purty soon the short man, noticin' the handle of my revolver, said it looked like it might make a fellah mad, f a bullet from it happened fur ter hit 'im.

" 'I made it myself,' says I, 'an' down in Georgy I uses it ter shoot bars with.'

" 'In ther winter,' sez I, 'I climbs inter ther cave whar ther bars lives, an' when I finds one at home, I feel uv his body tell I kin hear ther heart a-beatin', then I puts the pistol clost up an' shoots him dead.'

"Whilst we was a'-talkin' the other feller was a-countin' out some bills. When he had fingered over three thousan' dollars' worth of 'em, he put 'em on ther table befo' me an' I gev him three hundred dollars.

"I ast him how he could afford ter give me such a likely stack o' money, an' he said that was part o' the business an' he couldn't explain.

"He put ther stuff in er wooden box—I seen ther bills on ther top o' each package—an' I put the box in my satchel.

"When I left ther house, I went direct to ther hotel, an' it bein' nigh onto dark, I concluded I'd have supper, take another squint at my fortune, and then run over ter New York and spend a few dollars on the theayters."

Mr. Laroche uttered a deep sigh, looked appealingly at Orrant, and then proceeded.

"I don't want you to give this thing away on me, Jasper, for we're all weak creatures and ain't responsible for our actions, when you come to figger ther thing down to a fine point.

"Arter supper I went to my room—this yer room—an' I tuk out ther box ther greenback fellah had giv me, and opened ther packages to look at ther notes ag'in.

"What do you think, Jasper Orrant? Dog my skin if I hadn't been roped in, an' done fer slicker nor bar's grease.

"Every blame package—there were three on 'em—had a good greenback onto ther top ov 'em, but ther rest of ther package was nothin' but green paper.

"Fer three hundred dollars in good money I had reeseaved jest sixteen dollars and not a cent more.

"When I seen what I'd cum ter, I begun to think of ther ole 'oman I'd left behine on ther farm, an' of the darter she had been cryin' her eyes out fer. I began ter think how I'd lied ter that ole 'oman o' mine. I'd tole her that I was goin' up North ter hunt fer Viola Ann, an' never said nothin' 'bout greenbacks an' makin' a fortune.

"An' ther more I thot, Jasper, ther more I got ter cussin' myself. An' ther more whisky I poured down my gullet the more desprit I got, tell, at last, Jasper, I determined to commit susancide. I'd heerd 'bout ther gas racket, and I turned it on a purpose."

"What made you crawl under the bed?" asked the young man.

"Dunno, Jasper. I must ha' rolled under thar whilst a-tryin ter git ter ther door.

"And now," added the old Georgian, pathetically, "what am I gwine ter do, Jasper? I'm plumb busted, 'ceptin' ther sixteen dollars, an' that'll have ter go fer hotel bills, I reckon."

"Your bill to date will be ten dollars, Mr. Laroche," put in the clerk, blandly. "An extra dinner yesterday and a little bill for liquors, you know."

"I will settle that," said Orrant, "and —that's all, I believe."

The clerk interpreted the last words and the look that accompanied them as a dismissal, and left the room.

Laroche remained for some moments with his head bowed on his breast and his eyes closed.

Orrant sat watching him with a smile, in which contempt was mingled with amusement.

"Jasper," the old man said at length, as he raised himself on an elbow, and looked keenly at his companion, "I wanter ask you a question."

"Well?"

"Are you hankerin' arter Viola yit?"

The young man frowned.

Evidently the subject was distasteful to him.

He made no reply.

"Because if ye are I kin tell yer somethin'."

"Have you heard from her?" Orrant asked, shortly, and looking away.

"Not directly."

"Well, what have you found out?" Jasper asked, somewhat irritably.

"I've seed ther man what run away with her."

Orrant started and his handsome face put on a stern expression.

"Who is he? And where is he?" he quickly demanded.

"He is Mr. Lafarge."

"The man who roped you in on this green-goods racket?"

"Ther same."

CHAPTER II.

IN NICK CARTER'S HANDS.

"Did you know that Lafarge was the man when you did your rascally business with him?" asked the young man, in anything but a pleasant tone of voice.

"No."

"When did you discover the fact?"

"A minute ago."

Orrant turned up his nose.

"I mighter dropped onter him befo', Jasper," Laroche went on with a deprecating glance at the stern, contemptuous face of his companion, "if my mind hadn't been wrapped in the greenback biz. But sence I've been in the shadder ov death, Jasper, ther cobwebs have ben breshed away from my brain, an' I kin see now, plain as day, what is what an' which is which. Lafarge in ther man fer a thousan' dollars."

Jasper Orrant's eyes were on the floor. He was thinking of the past, of a dream of happiness that had been rudely dispelled.

Three months before the opening of this tale, he was basking in the smiles of the prettiest girl in Putnam County, Georgia.

Viola Laroche, tall, black-eyed, superbly formed, a veritable beauty as it seemed to the young man who adored her. She was not uneducated and unrefined like her father, and her mother had the blue blood of the Calverts in her veins. When Viola had reached the age of ten, she had been sent to a fashionable seminary near Mobile, and had received such an education as made her shine as a bright particular star in the best society the county afforded.

It was at a reception given to General

Gordon that she first met Jasper Orrant, a young lawyer.

It was a case of love at first sight.

Three weeks after they were engaged.

The young man believed that his sweetheart was as good as she was beautiful.

After reveling in an atmosphere of bliss for three months there came a sharp and terrible awakening.

Viola left her home one day for the ostensible purpose of visiting a neighbor some miles away.

She never went to the place, and she never returned to her home.

The next day when Jasper called to see her, he found her father and mother wild with grief.

A letter from Viola, brought by a colored boy that morning, told a story that turned the lover's hope and joy into bitterness and gloom.

"Dear father and mother," it said, "do not grieve for me on account of my sudden departure. It is all for the best. Jasper loves me no longer, and I cannot stay at the old place another day. I have gone with one who has promised to aid me in attaining a position I have long coveted. I will write again when I am settled."

She had never written again.

The father had entertained a travelling agent some days before, and inquiries made at the nearest railway station elicited the information that Viola and the agent had left on the train for the North together.

It was clearly a case of elopement.

And now Laroche was positive that the man Lafarge, who had swindled him out of three hundred dollars, was the villain who had spirited his daughter away.

Jasper Orrant had remained in Georgia, listlessly performing the duties of life, until Laroche's departure for the North.

The old Georgian had gone away with the avowed purpose of finding Viola and punishing the man who had stolen her away.

After he had gone Jasper discovered that the old man had had a second object in leaving home, and that was to better his financial condition by investing in New York greenbacks.

One of the sham tariff circulars fell into the young man's hands.

He instantly saw through the trick of the green-goods men, as he had always been a constant reader of the papers, and besides he had had considerable metropolitan experience.

Without saying anything to Mrs. Laroche that might add to the poignancy of her sorrow over the loss of Viola, Jasper told her that he intended to join the husband and father in the search.

Arriving at Elizabeth, he learned that Laroche had been seen in the company of a notorious New York swindler.

The result of his further investigations is known to the reader.

When Viola's father made the positive declaration that Lafarge was the scoundrel who had been the cause of the young girl leaving her home, Jasper instantly determined to find and punish him.

He also made up his mind that Lafarge should refund the three hundred dollars which he had swindled the old Georgian out of.

From Laroche he obtained complete descriptions of both Lafarge and the short man who had acted as the villain's confederate.

Then he said, curtly:

"I'll settle your hotel bill, and you will take the next train for home."

"What'll I say ter ther ole 'oman?"

"Tell her that I am on the trail of Viola's abductor, and that there was no need of your staying, as you could be of no use."

"That's so, Jasper," murmured the old man, contritely.

"You need not say anything about the

loss of your money, unless you think it your duty to tell your wife all about it."

"Do you think you'll get my money back?"

"I may."

"Then I won't say anything till I hear from you, Jasper."

No more was said.

Mr. Laroche left Elizabeth that afternoon for his Georgian home.

Jasper Orrant went to New York City, when he had put a railroad ticket into the old man's hand and bidden him good-by.

He had determined to put the case into the hands of the smartest detective in New York.

"You must secure Nick Carter," said Inspector Byrnes, to whose office Orrant had immediately betaken himself on his arrival in the great city.

"Where is he?"

"Here."

"In this building?"

"Yes."

"Where?"

"In the superintendent's office talking with Mr. Murray.

"Mr. Murray holds the position which you have been elected to fill, does he not?"

"Yes."

The inspector went to the telephone, and dropped a few words into the speaking-tube.

Two minutes elapsed, and Nick Carter, the great detective, stood alert and smiling before the young man from Georgia.

"Nick," said the inspector, "you were saying the other day that you were spoiling for another green-goods case. Here you are."

A few words told the detective the whole story.

"Lafarge and Fogg," was his quick comment.

"The smartest and most dangerous green-goods fakirs in the Union," added the inspector.

"As the post-office authorities are interested in this business, I think I'll wire Wanamaker and get an authorization to act for the Government," said Nick.

Jasper Orrant waited while the following telegrams went and came.

"John Wanamaker, Postmaster General, Washington, D. C.:—Green-goods men growing bolder in their operations here and in States adjoining. Would like official authority to take the field against them.

"Nick Carter, care Inspector Byrnes."

"Nick Carter, care Inspector Byrnes, New York:—Have wired Chief Inspector James, New York office, to give you all the power necessary for prosecution of your work. Hope you will succeed.

"Wanamaker."

"Nick Carter, at Inspector Byrnes' office:—Call and see me.

"C. C. James,
"Chief Inspector, N. Y. P. O."

That evening the great detective, with full authority from the post-office department to begin war on the green-goods men, started for Bridgeport, Conn., after a lengthy consultation with his faithful assistant, Chick, and Jasper Orrant.

Bridgeport was known to be the headquarters for the shrewd swindlers he purposed attacking, and he felt sure that in or about that place he would either see, or hear, tidings of Lafarge.

He was made up for the campaign as a typical cowboy.

On the railway cars he read the papers, bought nuts and candy from the train boys, and conducted himself in such a free and easy manner that he attracted the attention of a smartly dressed young man with black mustache and a pair of sharp black eyes, who sat a few seats below him.

Nick had spotted the fellow when he entered the car.

He knew by "the cut of his jib" that he was a confidence fakir, and probably in the green-goods business.

Pretty soon the young man got up and walked down the aisle and past Nick to the end of the car, and looked out the window.

He remained there but a moment, and then came slowly back, looking keenly into the faces of the male passengers on his way.

Opposite Nick's seat he stopped.

The great detective had just invested a nickel in peanuts.

He looked up when the stranger stopped, and, before the young man with the black mustache could speak, held out a handful of peanuts.

"Have some, mister," he said, in hearty Western accents.

"Don't care if I do," returned the other, with a smile.

"By the way," said the stranger, "I was looking for a man from the West or Southwest."

"What State?"

"Arkansas or Texas, I think. I can make sure by looking in my note-book."

He put his hand in his pocket, took out a small book, and was about to turn over the pages, when Nick spoke up:

"If he war from Texas, I might know him."

"Texas, yes——" looking on one of the pages—"that is the State. Texas, why of course. I ought to have remembered it."

The stranger took a seat beside Nick, book still in hand.

"His name was Peters, Crockett Alamo Peters. Did you know him?"

"Wuz he from San Antone way?"

"Yes."

"Don't ree-kolect ther name at a jump. What does he do fer a livin'?"

"He'a a bull puncher."

"That used ter be my gait."

"Yes?"—an assumed surprise and a look of gratified interest.

"Fact. I've punched bulls and rounded up cattle all the way from Durango to Santa Fe and from Santa Fe to Denver."

"He wrote me he was coming," said the stranger, as if to himself and with a shade of annoyance in his voice. "Dog gone a man who makes a promise and doesn't keep it," he added, quickly, with an indignant expression.

"I allus keep my promises," said the disguised detective.

"That's right."

A pause.

The stranger glanced furtively about him, saw that the nearest passenger was several seats away, and out of hearing, and then said, in a low tone of relief:

"Well, maybe it's just as well he hasn't shown up."

Nick smiled inwardly.

He knew what was coming.

"No man but a fool would miss such a chance of making a big stake for an insignificant outlay."

"What are yer drivin' at stranger?" queried Nick, his face the picture of devouring curiosity.

"The chance this fellow from San Antonio has missed."

"Money is a good thing to have, stranger."

"So it is. At least that's been my experience. By the way, how are taxes down in Texas?"

"Purty durn high."

"Causes a fellow to hustle to make both ends meet, eh?"

"Yes."

"There's nothing like making money easy."

"That's so," regretfully.

"And no risk about it either."

"Risk? Why should there be a risk about makin' money—'cept in tacklin' faro or poker."

"Do you play?"

"Once in a while."

The stranger's doubts were fast disappearing. He was feeling his way.

He was looking for a man who was not overburdened with moral scruples, but who at the same time was not disposed to do anything which might place him in the clutches of the law.

The cowboy looked like a promising subject.

Having made up his mind as to his course of action, the stranger took a sealed envelope from his pocket, handed it to the disguised detective, and said, mysteriously:

"Read that, and I'll see you later, about it. Mum's the word, whatever you may conclude to do."

"Eh?"

Nick's innocent stare caused the stranger to smile.

"Say nothing and saw wood."

"Oh, yes, I cotton ter that, right away."

"Where are you bound?"

"To Bridgeport."

"Good! I'll see you there."

The young man, with the black mustache, arose from the seat and held out his hand.

"Good-by for the present, Mister——"

"Austin Jobson."

"Good-by, Mr. Jobson, and——" lowering his voice to a whipser—"be sure and read what's in that envelope very carefully."

Nick nodded his head.

The stranger left the car.

Left to himself, the detective opened the envelope, took out a printed circular, and read as follows:

"No. 144 Mott Street, New York,
June 5, 1892.

"Dear sir:—We take this opportunity of making known to you our business. We are satisfied from investigation that you would make us a good agent, and therefore hope you will not be slow to take advantage of this offer."

"I'm jumping at it with my mouth open," muttered Nick.

"You will find our goods to be equal to any, and we know you will not have any trouble with them, as we have agents who are buying large amounts from us every month, and no one has any trouble."

"Every day," commented the reader, "a sucker leaves Suckerville with one of these circulars in his pocket."

"The paper used in our money is the same as that used in the genuine. The engraving is perfect in every respect, and no one on earth can tel. these bills from the simon pure article."

"Here is where the sucker pauses, for he knows that generally there is a big risk in attempting to pass counterfeit money. But the next paragraph puts a cinch on his misgivings, and he is ready to chance arrest."

Nick continued his reading.

"Our terms are $50 for $1,000, or for $100 we will send $2,300, or for $200 we will send $5,000. Better terms still, if we can see you personally. Write to our address for further particulars."

"That's one way to work the green-goods game," mused Nick, "for there's all kinds of bait for all kinds of suckers.

"I am one of the kind who play with the hook a little before biting.

"This chap, with the sharp eyes and black mustache, is neither Lafarge nor Fogg. But through him I'll find my men as sure as butter comes from grass."

At the Bridgeport depot, the stranger accosted Nick as if he had been an old friend.

"Well, Mr. Jobson, and what's the good word with you?"

Nick's look was solemn, and he answered:

"I'm plumb bothered."

"About what?"

"Money."

They were walking away from the depot, Nick with his only baggage, a satchel, in his hand.

"Money is easy to find, if you only know where to look for it."

"So I've heered. Reckon I'll be lookin' fer the place one of these days."

"What do you think of the circular I gave you?"

"That's the kind this yer Peters you was speakin' of got a hold of?"

"The same, and he wrote that he would come to Bridgeport on this train, and buy some of the goods."

"Have you got 'em ter sell?"

"Yes."

They were in front of a hotel.

Nick went in, the stranger following.

The disguised detective registered as "A. Jobson, San Antonio, Texas," and had the satchel sent up to the room assigned him by the clerk.

"Let's take a walk," suggested the green-goods man.

Nick, whose eyes had scanned the faces of the loungers about the hotel without seeing either of the men he was after, gave a ready assent.

The twain walked out of the hotel, and before long found themselves in the suburbs.

"If you want to invest," said the stranger, after they had entered a shady walk, "I can accommodate you."

Nick was about to make a satisfactory reply, when a low whistle behind him caused the young man with the sharp eyes and the black mustache to turn pale.

"We're spotted," he whispered, "and must separate. Will see you at the hotel, in your own room, in an hour."

Nick was disappointed.

The fellow was starting off, when he said:

"Who whistled?"

"My partner."

Nick said no more.

He allowed the green-goodsman to cross the street, and disappear round a corner.

Then he turned quickly and walked in the direction whence the whistling had come.

A man standing under one of the trees which bordered the walk, near a crossing, saw him coming, and at once turned his back to the detective, and began walking rapidly away.

But Nick had spotted him without seeing his face.

It was Billy Silk, a noted bunco steerer, who had served a term in Sing Sing, thanks to Nick's efforts, and who had been politely informed by Inspector Byrnes that his room in the metropolis was preferable to his company.

For some months he had been lying low and keeping out of sight of the officers.

Nick, who had heard that he had gone to Colorado, was surprised to see him in Bridgeport.

He was a keen-witted rascal, and he might have recognized the detective, in spite of the cowboy disguise.

And if so, the whistle of warning had not been given its right interpretation by the young man with the sharp eyes.

It had been a warning of another character.

It had said to the green-goods man: "Look out, you are talking with the smarest detective in the country."

Nick's jaws squared themselves in dogged determination as these thoughts passed through his mind.

Billy Silk was still ahead of him, and still walking like a man who has important business to attend to, and not a moment to spare.

At the first corner he turned.

As he did so Nick stepped behind a tree.

There he did a lightning disguise change.

He reversed his coat for one thing.

And his sombrero was submitted to a process of compression which left it one-eighth its wearing size, after which it was tucked away in an inner pocket.

Off went his sweeping mustache, and on went a black beard. A few other changes and he was transformed into an Italian mendicant, who needed only a hand organ and a monkey to make him independent and happy.

Billy Silk's form was still in sight when Nick turned the corner, and again took up the pursuit.

The fellow made many turns and crossings before he dropped into a slow gait on one of the streets near the Sound, but in the outskirts and where the houses were few and far between.

Sauntering carelessly behind him, ever and anon poking around in the gutters with a long stick which he had picked up, the disguised detective at last saw his quarry stop in front of a dilapidated frame house, which stood in a large swampy inclosure.

A raised walk of stone, overgrown with weeds, led from the gate to the front door.

As Billy Silk was about to enter the gate, a man came down the walk to meet him

It was the green-goods operator, he of the sharp eyes and black mustache.

Nick coming up, as they met and shook hands, heard Billy say hurriedly:

"Get inside, quick, for there's danger," and heard the other say in return: "It's a pity the boss is away, for he'd know what to do."

As they paid no attention to him as he passed by on the sidewalk, Nick came to the conclusion that his disguise was a perfect one.

The two men entered the house, and the door closed after them.

The detective determined to get in the building, and overhear what was said between them.

But how to do it?

That was the question.

It was not yet noon, and to make an attempt to enter by the back way, or any way, would be to invite certain discovery.

While walking from the gate and debating the problem, he thought he heard a faint call for help coming from the direction of the house.

He stopped and listened with all his ears.

The cry was repeated, and seemed to come from below the surface of the ground.

The house probably had a cellar.

He moved farther away, so that he could inspect one side of the structure.

The weeds prevented him from making sure on the point, but he was convinced, nevertheless, that there was a window on the side, and that the sound must have come through it.

It would never do to stand and stare at the house with the sharp green-goods men inside.

He walked slowly on once more, but with his ears strained to catch the slightest noise.

The call for help was repeated.

Nick's curiosity was aroused.

The house held a mystery.

He was resolved to unravel it.

By some means he must get inside, and at once.

The words of the young man, who had tried to rope him in, recurred to him.

"It's a pity the boss is away," etc.

They suggested a bold move, and upon the instant he resolved to put it into execution.

He walked back to the gate, quickly entered it, and strode up the walk like a man who had business there.

Arrived at the door, he paused for one

moment, and hearing no sound from within gave several loud knocks.

Presently there was head the movement of feet.

"Who's there?" called out a voice, which Nick recognized as Billy Silk's.

"A messenget from the boss."

The door was opened and the ex-convict looked Nick over from head to foot.

"Where is the boss?" he asked sharply.

"Elizabeth."

"What's your message?"

Nick looked furtively about, and then said, mysteriously:

"Da gal."

"Ah!"

Billy Silk started.

"Suppose dat I wass come in da housa, eh? Den I tella you better whata da boss say."

"Yes, yes; come in."

He ushered Nick into the front room. The game was now open in earnest.

CHAPTER III.

AN IMPORTANT DISCOVERY.

There was no carpet on the floor of the room, and the furniture consisted only of a square wooden table, several wooden chairs, and a large cabinet which fitted one corner diagonally.

A curious expression crept into Billy Silk's face when Nick turned his eyes on the cabinet.

The young man with the sharp eyes occupied a seat by the table, upon which he was nervously drumming his fingers when the detective entered.

"Now," said Silk, when Nick had taken a seat, "tell me what the boss said."

"He sayed data you mus' give a gal to me queeck."

"Got any writing to show that you are giving us straight goods?"

"Naw—no writing. Boss, he say data he was got a no tima."

"No time to write?"

"Si."

"What was he doing when he made you his messenger and agent?"

"He juss beena talk wida man data come from Florida."

"Were you present when they met?"

"Si."

"What was the first word."

"Da boss say one hund' seventy-seeks."

"One hundred and seventy-six. Well, what did the other man say?"

"He saya da sam'. And then they was commenca talka, talka, talka about mon'."

"What made the boss speak to you? Does he know you?"

"Dosa he knowa me?"

Nick assumed an expression of blank amazement.

"Dosa he knowa me?" he repeated. "Do you taka da boss for a foola?"

"No."

"Den, of course, he knowa me. Else how wuss he trus' me, eh?"

"What have you ever done for him that he should trust you?"

This question was asked by the young man at the table.

"I sava him froma de cop."

"When?"

"This morn'."

"What did the cop want of him?"

"To arres' him."

"What for?"

"Bouta what soma man data come from Virgin' say."

"Man from Virginia, eh?"

"Si, signor."

"And what did the man from Virginia say?"

"He saya data da boss rob him of a da beeg mon' by da game of a da grin-goods."

"Take him, Billy," said the questioner, "he's too fly for me."

Billy sat on one end of the table, and dangled his legs.

Nick was now satisfied that the two rascals were suspicious of him.

"You spoke of a girl," said Billy. "What girl do you refer to?"

"Da one in dis house," answered Nick, boldly.

"Really, now, but there must be some mistake. There is no girl in this house that I am aware of."

At that moment, as if for the purpose of giving the lie to his words, a muffled cry was heard.

It came from below—from the cellar.

The young man with the sharp eyes was about to leave the room, when a word from his confederate restrained him.

"Wait."

Then Silk turned again to the false Italian.

"You have not quite satisfied us," he went on, "that you are in the swim, as it were. You may be a detective for aught we know."

Nick smiled, and shook his head.

"Some better proof of your friendly connection with the party you call the boss must be given before we can admit you into our confidence. Come, trot out something now, and better to the point, or take a walk."

Once more came that muffled cry—the cry as of a person in deadly peril or grievous pain.

Nick felt that it was time to act.

"I gota something data I thinka will feex all righta," he said, quietly.

"That's good. What is it?"

Billy Silk was standing close to the other man.

Nick strode forward, as soon as Silk had spoken, until he stood in front of him.

Then, quick as a flash, up went his hands, clinched and ready for business.

Bif! Punk!

Down went the two green-goods men, as if a cyclone had struck them.

As they strove to rise to their feet Nick let out with his fists again.

This time he was the winner of a double knock-out.

Neither Billy nor his companion attempted to rise after the second assault.

But as Nick was stooping over them, handcuffs in hand—he had resolved to run them in on general principles—he heard a noise behind him that sounded like the cautious opening of a door.

He turned quickly to face the cabinet which stood in the corner.

The door was slightly ajar.

As he gazed at it wonderingly, it was seen to softly close.

What did it mean?

Who was in that cabinet?

If a man, why did he not come out?

Nick lost no time in useless speculation.

He arose to his feet, drew his revolver, and stepped resolutely toward the corner.

He was within three feet of the cabinet, when a sharp click of a spring was heard.

The next instant the floor gave way under his feet, and he was precipitated into a darksome hole some nine feet below.

As luck would have it, he struck squarely on his feet.

Before the trap closed, he heard these words spoken by the man who had stepped from the cabinet when the trap was sprung.

"That's the way to catch 'em, boys."

The voice was familiar to the detective.

It belonged to Pharis Fogg, the partner of Lafarge, boss of the green-goods men.

Nick ground his teeth in rage.

He had had the good luck to strike

the rendezvous of the rascal he was anxious to entrap, and then had been entrapped himself.

He was in total darkness.

The floor upon which he stood was asphalt or concrete.

Feeling about with his hands, he soon found that he was in a square apartment, the side walls of which were stone.

And there was no tangible evidence of a door or other outlet anywhere.

He was a prisoner in a room without light, and from which escape seemed utterly impossible.

The air was foul from insufficient ventilation, and after a time he began to experience the effects of it.

His head began to ache, his mouth became parched, and ere long a feeling of giddiness seized him.

This was a warning that he would sink into a faint that might pass into death, if he did not leave the place soon, either by his own volition or through the agency of his enemies.

He pulled his wits together for a final attempt to solve the mystery of his prison.

There must be some outlet beside that of the trap-door.

How had the trap been sprung?

By some person concealed in the cabinet, of course.

"That point being settled," cogitated Nick, "we come to the man himself, Pharis Fogg.

"He was not in the cabinet when I entered the room in the company of Billy Silk.

"Where was he, then?

"There can be but one answer, unless it is granted that Fogg has supernatural powers, which is out of the question. He was in some other room, which has an opening into the cabinet.

"That room may be on the same floor with the cabinet, or it may be below.

"My idea is that it is below, and that he ascended to the main floor in some way just after I arrived."

Nick ceased his speculations for a moment, in order to make an investigation that had not before occurred to him.

He felt his way to the corner, which he judged to be directly under the cabinet.

But there was no ladder, rope, or any contrivance there or thereabout, by which a person might hoist himself to the ceiling.

A failure to find anything of the kind did not discourage the great detective.

As a matter of fact, he had not expected to meet with success in this respect.

Some other method of egress had been used.

He slowly passed his hands up and down the stone wall, feeling carefully with his fingers, about all the mortared spaces.

While thus occupied he almost forgot his giddiness and the foul oppression of the atmosphere in the room.

He was forcibly reminded of his perilous surroundings when he was reaching highest in his effort to find the key of the cabinet puzzle.

His head all of a sudden began to whirl round and round, until in spite of all his efforts to throw off the feeling of suffocation that oppressed him, he sank down upon the hard floor.

One hand—his right—was thrown out, involuntarily as he straightened upon the cement, until it touched the extreme point of the corner.

At that moment, just as his senses were about to leave him, an electric thrill passed through his veins.

His fingers had touched a something that was neither asphalt nor cement.

Metal.

A button of brass or steel about the size of a quarter of a dollar.

Instinctively he pressed it hard, and

instantly something happened that acted as a revivifier.

It was a strange creaking noise over his head.

With an almost superhuman effort he rose to a sitting position and looked upward.

The darkness prevented him from seeing anything.

But he knew what the noise meant.

It still continued, and soon as he rose to his feet, and leaned against the wall for support, he felt a wave of cool air strike his face.

His strength began to return as if by magic.

In a moment the means of escape would be within reach.

For the button he had pressed was a part of a concealed mechanism that was used in lowering and hoisting the floor of the cabinet.

With his hands again raised, this time for the purpose of grasping the wooden car, he was congratulating himself that he would soon be face to face with the villain who had entrapped him, when a jarring noise above, followed by an excited exclamation, told him that his purpose and action had been discovered.

Instantly the car, as it might be called, had its movement reversed.

It began to rise when it was within a few inches of Nick's uplifted hands.

It was within a foot of the upper floor, when Billy Silk's jeering voice smote through the aperture upon the despairing detective's ears.

"It's no use, old boy, you can't make it. The jig's up with Nick Carter this time."

The detective clinched his hands, but made no answer.

"If you'll be real good and keep your brain in good condition, we'll come down and see you after a while."

Still no answer.

The floor of the cabinet was drawn into place, and all sound from above was cut off.

Nick was no longer in a fainting condition, for the air which had flowed in through the hole had given him a new lease of life.

He felt that he was good for active service for half an hour at least.

When the discovery was made by the villains above that he had learned the secret of the cabinet, and was about to make use of it, Nick felt a sense of acute disappointment.

But hope did not entirely leave him.

Pharis Fogg had ascended from the room he was now in.

And this was proof to Nick's mind that the partner of Lafarge had come, originally, from some other apartment in the cellar, and one which communicated with the room he was now occupying against his will.

There must, therefore, be a secret door somewhere, which was operated by a concealed spring.

Before Nick began his search for it, he pressed the button in the corner again.

It would not work.

The green-goods men had fastened the car at the top.

Perhaps they would lock the other door so as to prevent his making effective use of it in case he should find it.

Never mind. He must discover it, if possible, and give it a trial.

At last his search was rewarded.

Another button, similar to the one which had moved the machinery which had set the floor of the cabinet in motion, was found near another corner.

He pressed it, and one of the stones, which proved to be not more than an inch in thickness, swung open, revealing a narrow corridor, which was partially lighted up by a small grating at its farther end.

Ned crawled through, and closed the door behind him.

In the corridor there was a sufficiency of pure air.

As he hurried along toward the window, he came to an intersecting corridor, a short one, which terminated at a wooden door.

Nick stopped, and, as he did so, a faint moaning sound saluted his ears.

It came from the end of the shallow corridor.

The girl—he had hazarded a guess when conversing with the villains that there was a girl on the premises—was undoubtedly in that room.

Nick had taken one step in the direction of the wooden window, when a grating noise made him pause suddenly, and grasp his revolver.

He rightly conjectured that it was caused by the opening of a door, probably one of iron, and that his enemies had come down by another way to learn if he had discovered a means of escape from the room into which he had been precipitated.

The opening of the door was followed by the sound of footsteps along the main corridor.

Nick was out of sight, and crouching in the shallow passage near the point of intersection, when the form of Billy Silk hove in view.

Like a panther, the detective threw himself upon the ex-convict, and hurled him to the floor.

Behind Silk was the young man with the sharp eyes.

He was knocked down by a powerful right-hander before he was fairly aware of Nick's presence.

This time the detective did not leave the two men until he had bound them hand and foot with stout cords.

He was anxious to investigate the room which had the wooden door, but he must provide against any interference on the part of Pharis Fogg, who was probably upstairs.

In Billy Silk's pocket he found a large key.

This must fit the lock of the door leading out of the corridor.

So it proved.

Out of the corridor Nick hurried into a small room, with a stairway in one corner.

Up the stairs he hastened, and finding no locked doors in his way, reached the front part of the house without making any noise that would be likely to excite suspicion.

Before entering the room with the cabinet, he listened a moment at the door.

All was still within.

He opened it softly.

The room was vacant.

Where was Fogg?

Had he descended into the hole through which he (Nick) had been consigned, or had he left the house.

The point could soon be determined.

He went out the front door, walked down the path to the gate and looked up and down the road.

Ah, there he was, a couple of blocks away in the direction of the town, and just crossing the street.

Nick hurried back to the house, and quickly descended to the cellar.

He found Billy Silk and his confederate where had left them.

The pockets of each were explored for more keys.

Quite an assortment was found.

Nick tried one after another at the wooden door, and finally found one which would fit.

He turned it in the lock, and threw the door open.

The room was small—a seven by nine affair—and was provided with one small window, which was barred.

But Nick had no eyes for anything but the pale-faced girl who was sitting upon an iron bunk against the farther wall.

One hand was manacled, the chain being secured to an iron staple in the stone wall.

She could not move more than a few feet.

Her hair, which was black, was dishevveled, and abject fear looked out of her brilliant eyes.

She had taken Nick for an enemy, for he still wore his Italian disguise.

"Don't be alarmed," he said, quietly, as he approached, "for I am your friend, come to release you."

Her expression changed to one of joy unspeakable.

She tried to speak, but could not.

Then her slight form began to tremble, and she presently burst into a flood of tears.

But they were tears of happiness.

Nick waited until she was calm, and then took one of the keys from a bunch he had found in Billy Silk's pocket, and unlocked her manacle.

He first words were of gratitude for her release.

Then she inquired anxiously:

"Is he in jail?"

"Who?"

"The man who put me here."

"What is his name?"

"Lafarge is one of his names."

"No, he is not in jail, but he soon will be, I hope."

"He is a monster."

She shuddered at the recollection of her terrible experiences.

"He is, indeed," replied Nick, with a commiserating look; "and now I would be pleased to know your name, miss."

"My name is Viola Laroche."

"I thought so."

CHAPTER IV.

A CRUEL DECEPTION.

"You thought so," repeated Viola Laroche, in surprise.

"Yes, I am Nick Carter, a detective, and I was solicited to undertake this case by a fine-looking young man of the name of Jasper Orrant."

The girl flushed, and then a look of pain came into her eyes.

"I have treated him shamefully," she said.

"But not intentionally, I know."

"No. I was deceived by a villain."

Nick looked at her in such a curious manner when she said this that she hastened to add:

"He deceived me by making me believe he was going to help me to a situation, when he wanted me, instead, to assist him in his unlawful enterprises. We have never had any relations."

"I am glad to hear it."

"My story," she continued, "is a strange and unfortunate one."

"Perhaps you had better relate it now. Then I shall know how to act in regard to the fellows outside."

Nick told her how he had overcome Billy Silk and the young man with the sharp eyes.

Viola said that the latter's name was Duke Abbey.

"Is he in the employ of Lafarge?"

"Yes."

"And so is Billy Silk, I suppose?"

"Yes."

"Excuse me for a moment."

With these words, Nick got up, went into the corridor, and dragged his captives to a position near the door, where he could keep an eye on them while the girl was relating her story.

When he reseated himself by her side, he said:

"Now I am ready to listen to what you may have to tell."

"I was engaged to be married to Jasper Orrant, and was living in happiness and content out in my dear Georgian home," she began, "when this man Lafarge made his appearance.

"He was ostensibly travelling through the South as the agent of some agricultural patent. In reality he was looking for dupes upon whom he might work some of his many swindling schemes.

"He came to the house first on a Sunday when father and mother were at church. I had not been feeling well that day, and so had not accompanied them.

"He was on horseback and looked hot and tired.

"He asked for a glass of water. I gave it to him.

"After an hour's rest on the shady veranda, during which time he used his fine conversational powers to good advantage, he left with the promise to call and see father on the following day.

"He was true to his word, and after father had agreed to buy one of Lafarge's imaginary devices for the saving of labor on a farm, the villain started off in the direction of town.

"I was then far down in one of the lanes in the cotton patch, and he saw me from a distance, and waved his handkerchief.

"I returned the salute, and presently he was by my side.

"After a few commonplaces had been indulged in he said, in a grave tone of voice:

" 'I've bad news for you.'

"My heart almost stopped beating.

" 'Bad news,' I repeated, in a gasp. 'Is mother——'

" 'No,' he interrupted, quickly, 'your mother is all right. So is the old gentleman, your father. The bad news is concerning a young man, Orrant by name.'

" 'What is it?' I managed to ask, as he hesitated and looked at me pityingly.

" 'He is a married man.'

"You can probably imagine my sensations at this astounding statement.

"It was some time before I could command my voice sufficiently to reply, and then I told him flatly that I did not believe him.

" 'What possible object can I have in deceiving you?' he asked, with simulated earnestness. 'I do not know the fellow, and we are not rivals, for I, too, am married.'

"I looked at him incredulously in spite of what he said.

" 'If you care to have the proof, come with me and I will give it to you.'

" 'I will come,' I said, promptly.

" 'Until you have satisfied yourself that I have spoken the truth,' he went on, 'it will be best not to mention the matter to any one.'

"I ran to the house to make some changes in my dress, he promising to meet me at the edge of the town.

"Mother noticed my excited looks, but I diverted suspicion by saying that I was out of breath from running, and that I was in a hury to change my dress in order to go over to a friend's house in the neighborhood.

"Heaven forgive me for the lie I told, but in my confused state of mind I don't believe I was quite responsible for what I said.

"I know that but one idea possessed me, and that was to test the truth of the monstrous story which Lafarge had told me at the earliest possible moment.

"I met him on the outskirts of town, and he took me to the principal hotel.

"In the little upstairs parlor of the establishment I was introduced to a bold-looking woman of about thirty, who announced herself to be the wife of Jasper Orrant. She said that the marriage had taken place in Macon three years before.

"Fool that I was I did not ask to see her marriage certificate nor seek any corroboration of her remarkable averment.

"I believed her unsupported word, and in my grief and disappointment I was ready to listen to anything that promised to take me away from the place where my false lover lived.

"Lafarge said that Mrs. Orrant was an actress, and the recipient of a handsome salary.

" 'It is the easiest work in the world for a woman of beauty and intelligence,' he insinuatingly remarked, 'and if you, Miss Laroche, were to adopt the stage as a profession I have not the slightest doubt but that you would succeed.'

"I listened with dull ears until he said that he was on terms of intimacy with a leading New York manager, and that he could obtain a position for me at once if I chose to go North.

" 'You will have to commence at the lowest rung of the ladder, as a matter of course,' the plausible villain proceeded, 'but it won't take long to rise to a well-paying place. At the outset your salary will be ten dollars a week.'

"Ten dollars a week! Why, that would support me comfortably.

"I looked at him with eager eyes. He smiled, and spoke a few words to the woman who had represented herself to be Jasper Orrant's wife.

"She left the room immediately afterward, and when she had gone he said:

" 'I have asked her to telegraph to New York about the place to make sure. I know it was vacant a few days ago. We will get an answer inside of half an hour.'

"While she was away he tried to entertain me with stories of the metropolis, of the pleasures the rich and well-to-do indulged in, and how a woman of courage and ability had as good a chance of amassing wealth and making a name for herself in the dramatic profession, as a man.

"Half an hour passed and the alleged Mrs. Orrant returned with a smile on her painted visage.

"She bore in her hand a telegram.

"Lafarge took it, read it, and then passed it to me without a word."

Viola put her hand in the pocket of her dress and drew out a crumpled bit of yellowish paper.

"Here it is," she said. "I have kept it in my pocket ever since."

Nick saw that it was an ordinary telegraphic blank.

He also saw, when he scrutinized it carefully, that it had not been filled out by an operator, for the reason that it lacked the official marks.

"This Mrs. Orrant," he said, "wrote the dispatch herself."

"Yes, I know it now, but at the time I accepted the telegram as genuine.

"As you will see, it is signed 'A. M. Palmer,' and says that the place will be held for Mr. Lafarge's friend for two days.

"Just what persuasions were used to induce me to leave on the train for the North that afternoon I do not now remember. If I had been as cool-headed as I am now I would never have gone without writing mother a more explicit letter than I did. But I thought at the time that I had a good place, that I was on the way to fame and fortune, which I ardently desired, in order to punish Jasper Orrant by showing him what he had lost; and that I could write a good long letter, giving the fullest explanation of everything, when I was once installed in Mr. Palmer's theatre.

"We arrived in New York, and I was taken to a hotel near the Battery.

"Mrs. Orrant did not accompany us thither. She got off somewhere in the southern part of the city after we had crossed the river, and I have never seen her since.

"After having consigned me to the care of the matronly proprietress of the hotel, Lafarge left me for the purpose of looking

up Mr. Palmer, and concluding the arrangements for my engagement.

"I had no fears as to my own capabilities, for I was so foolish as to suppose that my experience in school elocution fitted me to become an actress after I had received a few weeks of technical training."

The richness and volume of her voice, the rare play of feature as she talked, added to the girl's beauty and grace, caused Nick to say at once:

"I believe you would have made your mark on the stage."

"Thank you. But I never will, though."

"No?"

"No. I have no desire now to become an actress. My dream of glory and riches is over."

She sighed, and for a few moments nothing was said.

Then a voice from the corridor was heard.

"Say, old lucky bones, how long is this seance going to last?"

The speaker was Billy Silk.

"An hour, may be," Nick answered, quietly.

"That's all right, then, for I didn't know but it might last a year. If that was the programme, I was going to suggest that you give it to us in installments."

"I'll install a gag in your mouth, Billy, if I hear any more such remarks, or any remarks at all."

"Beg pardon. I won't interrupt again."

He winked at his comrade, who was lying alongside of him, as he said this, but Duke Abbey only frowned.

In the latters opinion there was nothing to smile at in their surroundings.

Viola Laroche, at a word from Nick, went on with her story.

"I did not see Lafarge again until the next morning, shortly after breakfast, and when I was sitting in the parlor.

"There was a cloud on his brow as he advanced to greet me.

"'There's no honor in the profession,' he said, 'Palmer has gone back on us.'

"I stared at him blankly.

"'You won't get the position,' the villain continued, 'for the reason that it was filled last night.'

"This was most discouraging news, for here I was alone in New York, and with but a few dollars in my pocket.

"'But don't be cast down, Miss Laroche. If one way to make your living is closed to you another may be opened. I'll see that you get along all right,' he emphatically added, 'for I'm responsible for your being here.'

"I thanked him with my eyes, for I was too agitated to speak.

"'How would you like to take charge of a little office, and do nothing but receive letters?' he asked.

"'Anything that is respectable that I am capable of doing and that will give me a living will do,' I answered, as bravely as I could.

"'Then it's all settled. Hang it, but I believe I'm glad, after all, that old Palmer failed to come to time, for in the office you will have day work, and a regular sinecure.'

"'And the salary,' I timidly inquired.

"'Miss Laroche,' he said, 'I'll be generous with you. I'll give you ten dollars a week for a starter, just what you would have received had you gone on the stage, and if the business increases, as I think it will, I will raise your salary in a month.'

"I did not think then to inquire what the business was, for I was very unsophisticated, in spite of the education I had received.

"In the afternoon, after I had found a nice boarding place, he took me to the office he had spoken of.

"It is located on Eighth avenue, near One Hundred and Eighteenth street, and

contained nothing but a counter, a table, a desk, and two chairs, and a number of blank account books.

" 'I'll get you an outfit of stationery and fancy articles,' he said, 'and that will save you the annoyance of answering questions as to your business. You may not sell a dime's worth in a week, but that does not matter, for your real business will be to receive letters while I am away.'

" 'What are the letters about?' I asked, my curiosity in regard to his business being at last aroused.

" 'They are answers to circulars I have sent out,' he readily replied. 'I am agent for a great many patents, and the letters contain business propositions.'

"I was satisfied with this explanation, and the next day I entered upon the discharge of my duties.

"I did not sell much stationery, but I did receive a great many letters and telegrams, more of the latter than the former.

"Every night either Lafarge or Duke Abbey, who had been introduced to me as the villain's agent, would come to the office, open the letters, and then consult a large journal which was kept locked in a drawer of the desk.

"These telegrams came from all sections of the country, and I never knew what any of them contained until one day after I had been in the office about two weeks I picked up one from the floor, where it had dropped unnoticed by Lafarge.

"I could not resist the temptation to read it.

"It was from a party way off in Kansas, and said only: " 'Please renew my subscription for 1892.'

"What did it mean?

"Was Lafarge a newspaper or magazine publisher, as well as an agent for agricultural patents?

"I puzzled my brain all day over that telegram, and when Lafarge came in in the evening I handed it to him without a word of explanation.

"He instantly exclaimed:

"So you are onto the snap, are you? Well, I am glad of it, for if there's anything I hate it's secrecy among friends.'

"It was on my lips to say, 'What do you mean?' but I refrained, for my wits were sharpening under the experience I was undergoing.

"Instead of asking such a question, I simply said:

" 'I think you might have told me all at once.'

"He laughed heartily, for he thought I could be trusted.

" 'I tell you what, Viola,'—he had never been so familiar before—'we'll make the strongest team in the country now that you've got your eye-teeth cut. I am pretty good at hauling in suckers myself, but you, with your pretty face and your demure expression, ought to double discount me at the game, and give me points besides.'

"I was now determined to know what disreputable business he was engaged in, in order that I might have him punished.

"He had lied to me—his admissions told me that—and he had never intended that I should go on the stage.

"The scales were rapidly falling from my eyes.

"I was beginning to see some of the wickedness that my guilelessness and inexperience had hitherto concealed from me.

" 'Are you going to tell me about the snap?' I asked, when his fit of laughter had ceased.

" 'Yes.'

"And thereupon he entered into a full explanation of one phase of the green-goods swindle with which you are doubtless familiar.

"The circulars sent out by Lafarge contained this instruction: 'Don't write, but send either one of the following dis-

patches the day before you intend to start for New York:

" ' "Renew my subscription (which means I'll meet you at the depot, Elizabeth, New Jersey.)" '

" ' "Renew my subscription for 1892 (which means that the place of meeting shall be Bridgeport, Conn.)" '

"And so forth.

"The swindle was consummated at these meetings, and Lafarge said that he and the men working under him had made two hundred thousand dollars in one year.

"When he had finished his explanation I could hardly contain myself from shame and indignation.

"The expression of my face must have told him something, for when he left the office that afternoon he said he was afraid I might not like the business after all.

"I made no reply to this, for I had made up my mind to inform the first policeman I met of the character of the swindle I had been innocently engaged in.

"When I closed up the shop, and was putting the key in my pocket, a man stepped up to me, said he was a detective, and had been directed by Inspector Byrnes to make an investigation of Lafarge's office.

"Here was my opportunity.

"I reopened the shop, and when the detective had entered I told him all I had discovered.

"He was not a bit surprised at my revelation.

" 'The inspector has been onto him for some time,' he said, 'and what you have told me but confirms what we have suspected.'

"After he had looked over the books and papers he said:

" 'Lafarge has gone to Bridgeport, and I have telegraphed the local officers there to arrest him the moment he leaves the train. And that reminds me,' he went on, 'that neither I nor the Connecticut police know the man except by description. He will get out on habeas corpus, and leave us in the lurch if somebody does not go down by the next train to identify him.'

"I did not think this statement at all curious or improbable, and so when he suggested that I was the proper person to furnish the identification I had no objection to make.

"The next train for Bridgeport saw me as one of the passengers. The detective, for I considered him so, occupied the seat with me and paid my fare.

"Arrived at our destination he called a cab, and we were driven to this house.

"Not until I entered the front room up stairs did I suspect treachery.

"There, by the table, sat Lafarge, and by his side was Duke Abbey, the man who had acted as his agent.

"And not an officer or any other person in sight.

"But it was not so much their presence out of custody which led me to suspect that I had been the victim of a vile plot as the expression of the arch-villain when he caught sight of me.

"It was that of malignant triumph.

"I turned to my guide, the supposed detective, to ask an explanation.

"A look in his face as he turned it toward me made my suspicions so many certainties.

" 'Did you have much trouble, Fogg?' asked Lafarge of the man."

"Fogg!" ejaculated Nick. "He was the detective, was he? Pharis Fogg!" the green-goods man, partner of Lafarge, eh?"

"Yes, he was the man. I had been caught in a neat trap. But then it was not much of a trick to deceive an ignorant, inexperienced girl.

" 'No,' said Fogg to Lafarge's question, 'I had no trouble with her at all. She swallowed the hook with the bait.'

"Then the wretch laughed with much amusement apparently.

"I felt like tearing his eyes out, and he must have feared an attack, for as soon as he spoke he moved away to the side of his partner's in crime.

"When I asked Lafarge why he had treated me so shamefully he replied that he did it for self protection.

" 'You would have given me away to the detectives,' he said, 'if I had not forestalled you. Here in this house you must remain until I see fit to let you out.'

" 'You dare not imprison me,' I cried.

" 'Dare not,' he retorted, 'I dare do anything.'

"His tone frightened me.

"I started for the door, but Lafarge reached it before me.

" 'No, you don't,' he hissed, 'there is your place.'

"He pointed toward the cabinet.

"Duke Abbey and Fogg stepped in front of me as he spoke, and laid violent hands on me.

"In the grasp of three powerful me what could I do?

"I struggled as best I could, but was borne to the cabinet, which seemed to conceal a descending trap, and was lowered to the dark and foul smelling place under it.

"From there I was taken to the apartment where you now behold me, and upon my refusal to swear never to betray him in case I was released the villain Lafarge manacled me as if I were a dog.

"Before he left me he put the climax, as he thought, on my misery by informing me that Jasper Orrant was not a married man; that he deceived me in that as in all other respects.

This intelligence was pleasing rather than otherwise, for though I might never look on the face of my former lover again yet I would have the mournful satisfaction of knowing that he had never been false to me.

"That is all, Mr. Carter."

"A very neat fake, I must say," sneered Billy Silk from the corridor.

Nick turned an angry face in the rascal's direction to see something he had not bargained for.

At the opening into the main corridor stood Lafarge, while looking over his shoulder with a malicious grin was Pharis Fogg.

The two villains had reached the cellar by way of the cabinet "elevator," and without making any noise.

Lafarge held a revolver in his hand, and its muzzle was on a line with the detective's forehead.

The situation was a peculiarly perplexing one.

CHAPTER V.

THE WORK OF A FIEND.

Pharis Fogg was stooping down to cut Billy Silk's bonds, when Nick acted.

Unmindful of the pointed pistol, he sprang into the corridor, dodged the bullet that was aimed at him, and struck Lafarge a blow under the ear that knocked him down.

Then he turned his attention to Fogg.

That individual had cut the cords which held Billy Silk's ankles, and was rising to his feet, knife in hand, when Nick fetched him a side-winder which doubled him up on the hard floor beside his companion in crime.

As he fell the knife dropped from his hands unperceived by the detective.

Nick was kneeling down beside Lafarge, for the purpose of handcuffing him, when a warning cry from Viola Laroche made him jump quickly to his feet.

Too late to save himself.

Billy Silk had rolled over until his hands had touched Fogg's knife, and as the blade was sharp he managed to hold it, so that the cords about his wrists were easily severed.

He was on his feet and moving toward the courageous detective, when Viola's cry of warning rang out.

Nick turned to face the new danger just as the knife descended.

It struck him in the side, just over the heart.

A sharp metallic sound accompanied the blow.

Nick knew what that meant.

The knife's point had struck the case of his watch, and he had sustained no injury.

Billy Silk was about to follow up the thrust with another, not being aware that the blade of his knife was broken, when Nick's two strong arms encircled his waist, and he was hurled violently to the floor.

The ex-convict was a wiry fellow, and he tried his best to wriggle out of the detective's embrace.

All to no purpose.

Nick had his knees on the rascal's chest and his hands at his throat, and would have speedily had the cords on him again but for the return to sense and activity of the green-goods partners, Lafarge and Fogg.

Before Nick could turn his head, the butt of Lafarge's pistol descended on it, and he was stretched senseless beside the form of Billy Silk.

A moment later and Viola Laroche was in her prison-room again, with the door locked upon her.

Nick recovered his senses, only to find himself bound hard and fast.

He was conveyed to the hole from which he had escaped but a short time before.

After a short conference with his subordinates, Lafarge saw all three of them leave the house, and then he gave his whole attention to his detective-prisoner.

A good supply of fresh air poured its way into the windowless room from the cabinet aperture, while Lafarge remained in the hole.

When he stepped from the car of the cabinet, Nick, lying on his side, saw that he carried a lighted lantern in one hand and something which looked like a large cigar box in the other.

He placed the box in one corner, the lantern in another.

"I see you are curious to know what that box contains," he remarked, when he had squatted on the floor, a few feet from the prostrate detective.

Nick made no reply.

"Before I tell you what is in it, I want to inform you that this world is not wide enough for two such men as you and me.

"Alive you are a standing menace to my schemes of enrichment.

"I intend shortly to widen the circle of my operations, but it will be necessary before I make a move that your case should be effectually settled.

"When I leave this room, it will be to enter the apartment where Miss Laroche is now crying her eyes out.

"I have no design against her life, and I shall, therefore, conduct her to some other place which is more sequestered, and where she can be furnished with more of the everyday conveniences of this practical life.

"As for you, Nick Carter, the end of your life will come in one hour.

"That box contains a dynamite petard, and a lot of interesting machinery.

"It is set to go off at three o'clock."

The assassin looked at his watch.

"You have one hour and five minutes," he resumed, "in which to say your prayers and do a heap of regretful thinking.

"And now good-by. If we meet again it will be where a fire is unnecessary."

With these words Lafarge arose, took up the lantern, stepped to the car, and, touching the button, was drawn slowly up to the cabinet.

When he found himself alone, Nick began to tug with all his might at his bonds.

In vain.

Lafarge had put them on, and he was an expert at the business.

Then the detective rolled over and over, until he was near the corner where the box of dynamite lay.

But he did not touch it.

His face was within a foot of the box, and, as he listened, he heard a faint ticking going on within.

Half an hour passed and he still remained in front of the box.

All attempts to gain the use of his hands had failed.

There was no help for it.

He must die, be blown to atoms perhaps, unless help should come from some unexpected quarter.

He could only determine the time as it passed; he could only guess at the number of minutes that must precede the explosion.

When all his senses told him that the terrible moment was close at hand, he heard loud shouts from above, followed by several pistol-shots fired in rapid succession.

Soon the floor of the cabinet began to creak.

Some one was about to descend to his prison.

Who was it?

Friend or enemy, he would be running an awful risk, for the dynamite bomb might explode at any moment.

In feverish impatience, Nick waited for the newcomer to declare himself.

The car reached the damp floor of the prison-room.

"Where are you?" called an anxious voice.

Nick gave a great cry—a cry of mingled joy and terror.

For the newcomer was Chick.

"I'm here in the corner close to a dynamite bomb that may explode before you can get to it."

"I don't want to get to it, I want to get to you."

The faithful fellow hurried in the direction of his superior's voice, found the bound detective, and quickly cutting his cords, assisted him to his feet.

"Now for the elevator again," he cried. "Quick, or we may be too late."

Nick did not delay proceedings.

The two detectives reached the platform, which has been variously designated as "car," "elevator," and "floor," and had started on their upward journey, when a dull and startling thud was heard.

Chick clutched Nick's arm and waited for the end.

"We're gone up," he whispered.

A prolonged hissing followed the first noise.

Nick's spirits rose at a jump from zero to the highest degree of delight.

And when a sickening stench filled the room, he shouted in the mad exuberance of his joy:

"We're all right, Chick. The bomb's a fraud. It's fizzled."

And such, indeed, was the case.

Placed in the corner in the hope that it would send the detective to kingdom come, it had utterly failed to perform the work required of it, owing to some defect in its construction.

Chick burst into a laugh when he realized the situation.

They were now in the cabinet.

Leaving it, they stepped into the front room of the house.

Upon the floor lay a young man with closed eyes and his head in a pool of blood.

"Who is he, and what does this mean, Chick?"

"It means, Nick, that while you have been gone, I have had an adventure of my own."

"I am anxious to hear it, but I must

first ascertain if Miss Viola Laroche has left the house."

He hurried below by the other route, found all the doors open and the young lady's room empty.

"Just as I supposed," he said to himself; "but I wanted to make sure."

Returning to his assistant, who meanwhile had been bandaging the prostrate man's head, Nick said, eagerly:

"Go ahead, Chick, with your story."

CHAPTER VI.

TRICKED BY A SHARPER.

"You left me in New York," began Nick's gallant assistant, with instructions to pipe off the Mott street office and to shadow Lafarge or any of his men, should I find them about the place.

"You had instructed Orrant to work Elizabeth and Jersey City for points, and, after I parted with him, I made up as a German emigrant, and set out for Mott street.

"The office was there sure enough, and there was a young woman in charge of it.

"She was busily engaged in directing envelopes when I accosted her.

" 'Vas dis dot embloymend offiz dot I heered apout somedimes, alretty?' I asked her in my best dialect.

" 'What do you want?' she asked, without looking up from her work.

" 'Vat do I vant? Voark, py chimminy, und pooty quick, too, I bade you.'

"I thought she would say that I had made a mistake, and that she did not keep an employment office. Instead of that, to my surprise she said:

" 'I might find you a place, if I thought you would suit.'

" 'Yust try me, dot's all,' I made reply earnestly. 'Dere's nodding dot I can do ven I gets my sphunk down vonce.'

" 'Are you acquainted with the city?'

" 'Am I acqvainted mit dot zitty? Vell I should schmile vonce. I peen here zwie weeks, und knows der Pattery, der Bow-wowery, der Boo-wooklyn brwidge, und Onion square, und——'

" 'That will do,' she interrupted.

"Then she put another question.

" 'Can you keep a still tongue in your head?'

"I pretended not to understand her.

"Gan I geeb still mid my dongue in dot head of mine? Vell, I oxposes dot I guess so, nein?'

" 'What I mean is,' she went on, as she noticed my puzzled expression, 'can you keep a secret?'

" 'Geeb a secret? I gan geeb fere oof dem at vonce mit my eyes shut. Vas is das?'

" 'I will tell you.'

"She leaned over the counter and whispered these words in my ear:

" 'If you want to see Lafarge, go to the Harlem depot.'

"I was thrown off my guard by the words.

" 'How do you know I want to see him?' I exclaimed, in my natural tones.

"A jeering laugh was the answer.

" 'I thought so, because I know you, Mr. Chick,' she said.

"Confound her, but she had every reason to remember me. Nelly Cly, the ex-stewardess of the City of Boston, who assisted the Wall street band of thieves to escape over the Sound to a safe retreat in Connecticut."

"She is a smart one," remarked Nick; "but we were never able to directly connect her with any crime."

"I did not know her when I spoke to her as the German, for she has aged terribly, and besides she has changed from a blonde to a brunette.

"I felt mighty mean, I can tell you, when I found that she was onto me.

"I wasn't going to show that I was rattled, however.

" 'Look here, Nelly,' said I, 'I am not looking for any Lafarge, for I've got

nothing against him. I am after a sly coon that used to hang out in this quarter.'

" 'What's he wanted for?' says she.

" 'Holding up a kid hawker in Central Park.'

" 'Do I know him?'

" 'You might. He's small, olive complexioned, black-haired, smooth faced, and squints.'

"I talked as if I were in dead earnest.

" 'I think I saw such a party on Broome street this morning, as I was coming to the shop,' she says. 'Does he limp a little?'

" 'No.'

"She asked that question to catch me.

"When I answered 'no,' she said:

" 'I didn't see him, Chick, I was only joking.'

"Just at that moment I cast my eyes down the street, and who should I behold coming toward us half a block away and bold as you please, but our man, Lafarge.

"Nelly saw him as soon as I did, and she made a warning signal, which caused him to turn quickly and dart down Grand street.

"I followed quick on his heels, boarded a car of the elevated railroad, and was whirled away with him to the Harlem railway bridge, took passage after a short wait on one of the cars of the Harlem railway station, where we connected at Danbury with the Housatonic for Bridgeport.

"You must not think that I wore my German emigrant disguise all the time.

"Oh, no! Before I reached the elevated I had made a change by a quick dart into a hall-way.

"I was the toughest kind of a citizen you ever saw when I got on to the train.

"Well, everything worked smoothly, until we reached this town.

"At the depot the trouble commenced.

"When Lafarge alighted, he was met on the station platform by a man who was the exact counterpart of himself, mustache, side-whiskers, and all.

"As they stood together, I saw that the resemblance in features, apparel, etc., was so striking, that if I were to shut my eyes and have them separate I could not tell the true from the false, when I opened them again.

"Stop, there was one way of distinguishing them. The false Lafarge wore a pink rose at his button-hole, the other did not.

"After a few words uttered in a low tone of voice, my Lafarge took his twin by the arm, and they went into the gents' waiting-room of the depot, and closed the door quickly behind them.

"I foresaw what the game would be, and prepared for it.

"They had not been out of my sight half a minute before the door opened again, and out they came.

'The train was just starting up for the New Haven stretch.

"The two Lafarges, as I will call them, walked to the steps of the last car, and shook hands.

"The one with the rose in his button hole got on the platform, and made his way to a seat in the car.

"I followed him in the belief that he was my man, imagining they had exchanged the rose for my benefit.

"I was a passenger with the man with the rose in his button hole, and we traveled together as far as Stratford.

"There he got off.

"So did I.

"On the platform he caught sight of me, and smiled.

"That smile opened my eyes to the truth.

"I had been tricked.

"The Lafarge I had followed from New York to Bridgeport had smiled many times on the car, but it was not the kind of a smile this fellow had.

"Lafarge's smile was something not

"Ah!"

The ejaculation was most expressive.

"Has Lafarge any other office besides the one on Mott street?"

"Yes. The principal one is on Park Row."

"What number?"

"112."

After a few more questions, which elicited nothing of importance, the two detectives left the house.

Their first move on reaching town was to send a wagon for the wounded man, and have him conveyed to the nearest hospital.

All this took time.

It was shortly after dark when they went to the telegraph office.

There was a dispatch there for Nick.

It was from Jasper Orrant, at Elizabethport, New Jersey, and read as follows:

"Lafarge and another man, short and with red hair ('that's Fogg,' commented Nick), with a woman closely veiled and acting like an invalid, landed here from a Sound boat half an hour ago. The short man and the woman have just started in a closed carriage in a northwesterly direction. Lafarge took the train for New York. I will follow the carriage."

"I am going to New York," said Nick.

"And I had better go to New Jersey," said Chick.

"Yes. Orrant may need help."

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CHAPTER VII.

NICK LANDS HIS FISH.

From Inspector Byrnes Nick received one of the circulars which had been sent out from the office in Park Row.

It had been taken from an Indianian who had come to New York to buy green-goods, but who had fallen into the good hands of Captain Cullagh at Morrisiana before he had met either Lafarge or one of his agents.

Provided with this circular, and with certain other points, and made up as Solomon Gashwilder, of Indiana, Nick dropped a postal into a Broadway box, and awaited developments.

That evening he received a visit at the temporary quarters he had taken up at a Third avenue lodging-house.

The visitor was Duke Abbey.

After a short conversation, which left Nick satisfied in mind that the fellow had not spotted him, the pseudo Gashwilder was requested to bring his wallet and himself to the New Haven and Hartford Hotel, over Harlem Bridge, on the following morning at nine o'clock.

Nick hunted up Inspector Jacobs of the Post Office department after Abbey left, and received from him a certificate of deposit for three hundred dollars on a Boston bank.

With this certificate he was to buy three thousand dollars' worth of greengoods.

Nick was at the hotel on time.

To his delight Lafarge was awaiting him.

They shook hands heartily.

"I am very glad to see you, Mr. Gashwilder," said the schemer. "Suppose we go down town now, and take a look at the goods."

"Suppose we do."

Lafarge took Nick to a place on Elizabeth street, near Broome.

They started up a dark and narrow passage to the seond floor.

At the door of a small room a long wait occurred.

The door was provided with a wicket, and after two sharp raps, followed after an interval of ten seconds, by three more, the wicket was opened, and the head of a man was disclosed.

Nick recognized him as Billy Silk.

"What's your number?" he asked.

Lafarge turned to Mr. Gashwilder.

"Ninety-seven," said the disguised detective, promptly.

The door opened and Lafarge motioned Nick to enter.

The disguised detective glanced around the room, and saw an old man sitting at a desk which opened at the top.

He had a big package of good money before him, and Nick, as befitting his assumed character, went over to the desk, with his mouth wide open in delighted wonder.

"Well, by gum, and is this ther kind o' money I'm ter buy?"

"Yes," said Lafarge, who was by his

to be forgotten, for he invariably contracted his eyes in a most peculiar manner.

"To make sure that I had got the rights of the matter at last, I watched this Stratford fellow's face secretly, while he stood gazing at the passengers, to see if he would smile again.

"Yes, he did smile for the second time.

"A young and handsome lady, in alighting from the car in front of us, had the train of her gown catch in some way, and she would have fallen to the platform had not my quarry stepped forward quickly to her assistance.

"He smiled then, not once, twice, but many times, and with never a contraction of the eyes.

"As I stood watching him, I noticed something that I made a mental note of.

"Upon his neck, under his right ear, was a large mole.

" 'I'll not mistake you again for somebody else,' was my thought.

"Another train going west was due in twenty minutes.

"I determined to take it, and let my man with the mole go where he pleased, unhindered by me.

"So I gave no further attention to him, but when the train came along, I got aboard and was carried back to Bridgeport.

"I was in the smoking-car all the way.

"After the train had pulled out of the station, the door nearest to me opened and a smooth-faced man in dark clothes entered, and hurriedly passed me.

"As he went by, I shot him a quick, searching glance.

"His face was unfamiliar, but under the right ear was a large mole.

"The false Lafarge beyond a doubt, and in his proper person, without a disguise.

" 'Good!' thought I, 'for I may now shadow him to some purpose.'

"He alighted from the train at this place, as I thought he would, and made a bee line for the Sound.

"I was sharp on his trail, not as the tough, but as my natural self, which was efficient as a disguise, for I felt satisfied that the fellow did not know me.

"When he entered this house I was close at his heels, but he was so excited he did not look behind him.

"He was in the cabinet, and was about to descend, when I softly opened the door of the room.

"He heard me and left the cabinet, pistol in hand, to meet me.

"Bang! went his gun when he saw me, and bang! went mine at the same instant.

"My shot took effect, and he fell to the floor.

"As I stooped over him he murmured faintly:

" 'I'm done for, I guess. If you want to help Nick Carter you'd better hurry up.'

" 'Where is he?' I asked.

" 'Down below. Go in the cabinet, find a button in the corner, press it, and down you'll go.'

"I did not wait to hear more, but hurried to the cabinet."

This finished Chick's story.

Nick made an examination of the wound on the head of his assistant's victim, and found that it was not serious.

The bullet had simply cut the scalp, and had not penetrated the skull.

Procuring water from the kitchen Nick bathed the fellow's face, and he was soon able to sit up and converse.

But the great detective did not inform him that his injury was a slight one.

He preferred that for the present he should remain under the impression that he had received a mortal wound.

"As you have helped me in one instance," began Nick, "you might as well continue your good offices."

"I am willing."

"Where is Lafarge?"

"I don't know where he is if he is not here."

"Has he any other retreat than this?"

"Yes, one other."

"Where is it located?"

"Near South Elizabeth, in Jersey, off the Linden road a piece."

"What kind of a place is it?"

"A brick house in a hollow."

"Is it occupied?"

"Yes."

"By whom?"

"By Lafarge's brother, a doctor, who keeps it as a private insane asylum."

side, "and there isn't an expert in the country who could tell it from the genuine government goods. Handle it yourself."

Nick knew the money was good, but he took up a package of the bills and put on a pair of spectacles and appeared to make a very minute examination.

"I reckon I'll invest," he said, emphatically.

"That's what they all say when they see the goods. Now, father, get the order book out, and we'll proceed to business."

Nick had already spotted the old man.

He was Pharis Fogg, and he must have arrived from Jersey the night before.

But where were Chick and Orrant and Viola Laroche?

These questions must be answered later.

Fogg produced an order book from the desk.

Lafarge then turned to Nick.

"Count out three thousand dollars of that money yourself to make sure that you are not being cheated."

Nick counted out three thousand dollars.

Lafarge took out a little brown box from the desk.

"Put them in that," he suggested.

This was done.

"Now put your John Henry in that order book, and the thing's settled."

While Nick, with his tongue out, was laboriously struggling with his name, the "old man" deftly substituted the usual package of green paper for the package of good money.

Lafarge picked up the box containing the green-goods.

"Come with me to the Adam's Express office," he said.

Nick, who had not given up his certificate of deposit, had nothing to say against this proposition.

They went down stairs, and entered a room on the ground floor which was fitted up exactly like a branch express office.

There were trunks and boxes and packages on the floor and a clerk behind the counter.

Lafarge handed the box to the clerk, and received a receipt written on a regular Adams Express blank.

Lafarge paid one dollar, and put the receipt in his pocket.

"Now," said he to his intended victim, the guileless Gashwilder, "I'll retain this receipt until you cash that certificate and hand over the money."

"That's agreeable."

Matters were moving entirely to Nick's satisfaction.

Lafarge suggested that they go to some bank and see if the certificate would be honored.

Nick said he had done business with the Chase National and that they knew him there.

"To the Chase we'll go then."

The great detective could not conceal his satisfaction.

He had arranged with the post-office detectives to be at the bank when he came there with Lafarge, and Inspectors James and Jacobs were on hand when the green-goods sharper and his intended victim put in an appearance.

While waiting at the bank the officials had allowed the Chief Inspector, James, to take the numbers of six fifty-dollar silver certificates and mark them for future identification.

This was done by making a pinhole through the left eye of Edward Everett on each certificate.

Lafarge and Nick on entering walked up to the paying teller's window, where the false Gashwilder presented the certificate of deposit for three hundred dollars.

The teller handed him the six marked bills.

"Here you are," said Nick, and he held out the money to the green-goods man.

The post-office inspectors prepared for action.

They believed that the villain would at once swallow the bait that had been prepared for him.

But he was too wary.

A bank was not the place for the transaction of private business.

Nick, who had not looked for an acceptance of the marked certificates then and there, was not disappointed when the green-goods man said:

"Put 'em up. This isn't a good place to close the deal. Follow me."

Nick put the certificates in his pocket, and the two went out.

As it had been arranged that the arrest should be made by the post-office men, the two inspectors, James and Jacobs, followed Nick and Lafarge out.

Up Nassau street to Fulton went the detective and his quarry.

They entered a saloon on the south-east corner.

James and Jacobs came up a moment later, opened the door softly, and peering in saw Nick and Lafarge pass into the washroom and close the door after them.

Up to this moment Nick Carter had played a careful and clever game.

It had been no simple trick to deceive so accomplished a scoundrel and shrewd a trickster as the man Lafarge, who for years had successfully eluded detection and capture.

In the wash-room Nick exhibited no eagerness to obtain the express receipt.

On the contrary, he said, when they were secure from hearing and observation:

"I dunno, mister, but I may be takin' a big risk in cartin' home them green-backs."

"Risk! Pshaw, man what's come over you?"

The villain spoke sharply and nervously.

"It can't be possible," he thought. "that I am going to lose my sucker, when I've got the hook in his mouth."

"Are you plumb sure, mister, thet ther bills are persisely like the ones Uncle Sam sends out from Washington?"

"Haven't I said so, and haven't you seen and felt of them? Say, have you ever heard of any one being arrested for passing them?"

"No, I can't say es I hev, mister."

"And you never will."

"Well, I reckon I've got ter go on, seein' es how I've waded in so far, mister."

"You'll never regret it."

"Hope not."

"Come, then, hand over those silver certificates."

"Here you are."

"And here in the express receipt."

The transfer was made.

Nick drew a deep breath of relief and satisfaction.

Lafarge, the bold operator, was in the toils at last.

The two men passed into the saloon.

"Have a drink," said Lafarge, easily.

"Don't care if I do."

They walked up to the bar, and Nick called for soda.

The green-goods man in his elation over his supposed victory called for whisky straight, and threw himself on the outside of a four-fingered fill-up.

He smacked his lips with an "Ah-h-h! that's the caper," and then started briskly for the door.

As he stepped out Inspector Jacobs placed his hand on his shoulder.

"I want you."

Lafarge's coolness and self-possession instantly deserted him.

He made no resistance when the handcuffs were placed upon his wrists.

And resistance would not have been of any avail had he made it, for close behind Jacobs stood Chief James, while behind the villain was Nick Carter, the man who had run him down.

The great detective saw the defeated green-goods man depart in good company, and then he started for the Elizabeth street joint.

On the way he met Chick.

Nick was overjoyed to meet his faithful assistant.

"Is the girl all right?" he asked, after they had shaken hands.

"Yes."

"And Orrant."

"Happy as a clam at high water."

"Good. You can give me the particulars if you chose later."

"What's up? Where are you going?"

"To Elizabeth street. And I want you to come with me."

"That suits, if there is fun in prospect."

"There is."

They hurried to the dingy office where the "old man" had given Nick the box of green-goods, to find Billy Silk and Abbey in possession.

They were quietly placed under arrest.

The "old man"—Pharis Fogg—had gone.

"I think we'll find him in Elizabeth or thereabout," said Chick.

"What makes you think so?"

"Because when he left the brick house where he had consigned Viola Laroche he had no idea that we were onto him."

"Any one at the house now?"

"No."

"Where's the doctor, Lafarge's brother?"

"We scared the wits out of him, and he's left the country for his country's good."

"Tell me all about it."

"Well," began Chick, "I got to Elizabeth in time to catch Jasper Orrant as he was boarding a train for New York.

"He had followed Fogg and the veiled woman—who was Viola Laroche, and who had been drugged to make her come along all right—to the brick asylum where Dr. Lafarge holds forth, and upon discovering what kind of an establishment it was had hurried back to Elizabeth for assistance.

"Not finding either of us about, or obtaining news of us at the telegraph or post-office, he had made up his mind to go on to New York.

"I got onto him just in time, as I have said, and we started out yesterday afternoon to attack the asylum.

"I obtained a pointer on the doctor before we left Elizabeth, and when we rung the big bell at his door I knew I could fetch him.

"We went out without disguising ourselves, and when the doctor saw us he guessed what we wanted.

"I didn't waste any words on him.

" 'You will produce Miss Viola Laroche within five minutes, or you will accompany us to Elizabeth to answer to a little charge of malpractice that has just been preferred against you,' says I.

"That was stretching the truth a little.

"A charge of that kind could have been preferred with the likelihood of sending the doctor to prison, only the party most interested had refused to prosecute on account of the unpleasant notoriety that the case would give her.

"But he knew nothing of this, and he turned as white as a sheet at my words.

" 'There is a young lady of that name here,' he stammered. 'If I produce her will your claim be satisfied and will you leave me unmolested?'

"I answered in the affirmative, and in less than two minutes he brought out the girl.

"You should have seen Orrant when he beheld her, pale and weak, but still beautiful.

"And you should have seen both of them during the next five minutes.

"We left Dr. Lafarge with the intimation that he might be prosecuted if he remained in that neighborhood, and before I left this morning to come over to New York I heard that he had skipped the country."

Nick and Chick went to Elizabeth that afternoon and arrested Pharis Fogg.

He was prosecuted for the abduction of Viola Laroche, and got a five years' sentence.

Lafarge and his tools were tried in the United States Court, and received severe sentences for their fraudulent use of Uncle Sam's mails.

Jasper Orrant and Viola were married, with Nick and Chick as witnesses, on the day following Fogg's arrest.

They are now living happily in their Georgian home.

The great detective and his able assistant were highly complimented by Inspector Byrnes and Postmaster-General Wanamaker for their clever work.

[THE END.]

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